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ABSTRACT

Previous school-community research in American Indian communities has demonstrated that "isolation" or lack of communication between school staff and community parents has contributed to the failure of educating American Indian children. To validate this research in the Southwest, a diary indicating the out-of-school activities was requested from teachers interviewed during the 1968-69 school year as part of the National Study of American Indian Education. Each teacher was requested to anonymously account for his or her out-of-school activities over a 15-day period. Approximately 20% of the teachers returned a diary (20 diaries). Of a total of 439 recorded events outside of school time, 126 (or 29%) involved Indian people. Of this number, 74 (or 17%) were school-connected events and 52 (or 12%) were nonschool-connected. A "typical" school would show percentages of 24%, 17%, and 6% for the same categories. Remedies suggested in the report included a unified staff approach, recreational activities for both teachers and parents, and "T" grouping to improve teacher-community contact. (LS)

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THE NATURE OF TEACHER-COMMUNITY CONTACT IN SCHOOLS SERVING SOUTHWEST INDIAN CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

Previous school-community research in American Indian Communities has demonstrated that "isolation" or lack of communication between school staff and community parents has been a contributing factor to the failure of educating American Indian children.

To validate this research in the Southwest, a diary indicating the out-of-school activities was requested from teachers interviewed by the National Study of American Indian Education during the 1968-69 school year. Each teacher was requested to anonymously account for his or her out-of-school activities over a 15-day period, and mail the results to the Southwest Center. (See Appendix A)

The diaries were coded and tabulated according to a hierarchy of opposing categories, e.g., Indian - non-Indian involvement; recreation - business; school - nonschool; local - distant, etc. (See Appendix B) Percentages were calculated by school locale demonstrating the ratio of non-Indian events to Indian community contacts of either school or nonschool orientation.

Approximately 20% of the teacher sample returned a diary (20 diaries). The diaries returned were generally positive and sometimes neutral in tone, which may indicate morale problems and dissatisfaction lie within the unmotivated and unresponding 80%. Also, it is possible that the precise directions may have caused respondents to avoid completing their diaries; and a few teachers indicated that the diary was "prying into their personal lives."

It was hard to judge the significance of the most deviant percentages since they were from schools with only one diary submitted. (The School District 121 diary was completed by an Indian which accounts for a high percentage of Indian

(cont'd on p. 3)

RESULTS

Out of a total of 439 recorded events outside of school time, 126 or 29% involved Indian people. Of this 29% 74, or 17% were school connected and 52 or 12% were nonschool connected. A "typical" school would show percentages of 24%, 17% and 6% for the same categories.

Tabulation of Coded Diaries

Events

	INDIAN CONTACT			NON-INDIAN CONTACT	TOTAL # EVENTS PER SCHOOL
	School Focus	Non-School Focus	Total		
School District 119	13* .14**	19 .20	32 .34	61 .66	93
School District 116-Elementary	8 .19	12 .28	20 .47	23 .53	43
School District 116-Secondary	12 .17	4 .06	16 .23	56 .77	72
School District 123	8 .17	3 .06	11 .23	36 .77	47
School District 120	14 .18	4 .05	18 .23	59 .77	77
School District 124	6 .16	3 .08	9 .24	29 .76	38
School District 121	8 .31	7 .27	15 .58	11 .42	26
School District 117	5 .26	0 .0	5 .26	14 .74	19
School District 118	0 0	0 0	0 0	24 1.00	24
TOTAL	74 .17	52 .12	126 .29	313 .71	439

*Number
**Percentage
***Figures below this line are based on a single diary.

contact. School District 117 reflects one teacher's efforts to employ a local boy within the school.) However, the above figures generally bear out our expectations as to similarities between the Southwest and the Wax report in regard to teacher-community isolation.* +

It is hard to say what accounts for the teacher isolation from the community in the "typical" school situation. However, some significant clues may be obtained by looking at the two most noteworthy exceptions to the "typical" figures. Discarding School Districts 121 and 117, School Districts 119 and 116 Elementary emerge as the two schools evidencing the most community contact. Also, very significant is the fact that in contrast to the other schools, more of these contacts are non-school oriented.

Both the diaries from District 116 Elementary and the contacts of the field team show these teachers to be quite conscious of themselves in their role as teachers and very sensitive toward others. Institutionally, their staff policy extends far beyond school concerns, and into the general welfare of the people they serve. Also there is concrete documentation in two diaries of a staff meeting in which community contact was discussed in great depth.

Thus, one might hypothesize that in School District 116 Elementary, community contact is the result of strong staff goals and a concrete approach to methods of contact.

From the diaries of the teachers in School District 119, their community contacts seem to be natural accidents rather than the result of deliberate action. School District 119 has the most compact and closest community area of all the schools studied, hence proximity seems to lend itself naturally to more contact.

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*The percentages show that most teachers spend very little time with the Indian community members. When they do interact, it is primarily at a school-centered event, and very rarely purely social.

+Wax, Murray L., Wax Rosalie H., and Dumont, Robert V., "Formal Education in an American Indian Community," Social Problems, Vol. 11, No. 4, Spring, 1964.

Specific teacher-Indian encounters are all of a pragmatic rather than strictly social nature (shopping, etc.). Also, within the teacher compound itself, the diaries indicate much mutual help, doing of favors, and general sociability, which may carry over into a forward and "matter of fact" approach to the Indian community. Some contacts can also be attributed to the employment of locals in the school. Hence in School District 119 proximity and staff gregariousness are seemingly crucial factors.

Considering the other schools, they seemed to lack evidence of an attitude or approach toward contact, a nearby community to go to, or practical needs that could be satisfied in the community. In these other schools most contact came about through school-oriented functions, attended mostly by students.

Regarding general life style, most of the teachers spent their spare time relaxing by visiting on the compound, watching TV, and reading; with the usual weekly long distance shopping and fun visit to a large city. There is very little mention of using local natural resources, and no mention of local ceremonials, etc. Quite naturally, most of the single people or one-spouse family heads spend about half of their time alone; whereas, full families rely on one another. There were few negative comments, most descriptions being rather neutral in tone.

In regard as to whether teacher-community contact improves classroom technique, etc., this remains to be systematically pursued and demonstrated. However, it was felt by the field staff that the teaching at School District 116 Elementary was generally good and at School District 119 generally poor. This may indicate that contact alone does not necessarily lead to better cross-cultural understanding. What seemed crucial was the staff of District 116 Elementary tended to abstract and discuss the contacts in conscious terms of gaining insight; whereas at School District 119 only one teacher evidenced this, and not the staff in general.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The most crucial aspect of a positive school-community relationship appears to be the presence of a well-articulated and self-conscious staff approach to gaining insight into the local Indian life style.

A possible remedy for low teacher-community contact would be a unified staff approach arrived at through intensive staff meetings and not merely token encouragement. Also, situations might be created to facilitate contacts, especially where there is no natural community setting. For example, since most interaction is already at standard school recreational events, it might be of benefit to gear some of this recreation directly to adults; including both teachers and parents.

Another more radical suggestion is to do "T" grouping and sensitivity training with the teachers, taking an anthropological slant; teaching the teachers how to gain the most from their ventures into the Indian community.

APPENDIX A

DIARY--SOCIAL LIFE SPACE

We would like you to make a daily recording of your activities over a 15-day period (not interrupted by school holidays). Record your activities in terms of blocks of time, omitting domestic chores and routine. For each block of time or event, try to include:

(1) The nature or type of activity and something of what was done. (i.e., trips, emergencies, ceremonies, highlights of the school day, school business after hours, entertaining of guests, etc.)

(2) The approximate length of time in terms of hours or fractions thereof.

(3) Who was involved in terms of their role (i.e., guest, faculty member, relative, merchant, etc.)

(4) An evaluation in terms of your personal reaction to the event. (i.e., pleasure, boredom, desire for recurrences, etc.)

(5) Also whether your participation was voluntary, routine or obligatory

(6) Where the activity took place.

Return this diary to the research team in the appropriate envelope.

This material is entirely confidential.

APPENDIX B

DIARY CODING SCALE

			INDIAN INVOLVEMENT YES		NO	
BUSINESS	LOCAL	Nonschool (including "domestic")				
		School (after class)				
	DISTANT					
RECREATION	LOCAL	Nonschool				
		School				
		Entertainment				
		Entertainment and Business combined				
			Self (f)= family	2+	Self (f)= family	2+

FEELING - TONE OF EVENT

+ = good

0 = neutral or unable to tell

- = negative

Directions for Coding

1. Isolate each event given per day. (Exclude classroom events.)

2. Record a mark (+, 0, -) for each day at least and a mark for each event if more than one indicated per day. (Minimum 15 marks)

3. Categorizing event decisions
   (a) Business or recreation
   (what is not "rec" is "business")
   (b) Local or distant
   School or nonschool

   (c) Indian involvement (at ceremony, visit in home, thinking about Indian community, etc.)

   (d) Self (alone) or group (2 or more)
   (f) = family group

   (e) Feeling tone
   (See code below paradiagram)